

Remarks of Lt. Governor Becky Skillman at the  
Michigan City Athena Awards  
April 22, 2010

Thank you so much. It's great to be back in LaPorte County for my sixth visit, although it's the first time I've been in the Stardust Event Center. Thank you so much for hosting us this evening.

I'm proud to be here to honor this year's Athena Award nominees. As I've participated in the Athena Awards in different communities around the state, I've been continually impressed by the caliber of women who call Indiana home. There are no better examples than today's nominees – Jane Daley, Joann Engquist and Suzanne Morris.

It's important to note that not only have these women succeeded in their fields, they've done it during one of the most difficult and competitive times in recent history. That speaks to the time and effort they've put into their work and their communities to stand out from the crowd.

It's thanks to the Hoosier women we're honoring here, and countless others, that we see signs that the economy is improving. However, many Hoosier families continue to struggle. And that means they need our business community to be stronger than ever to produce opportunities and keep us going.

The challenges we have before us now are merely disguised opportunities – to innovate, be creative, seek out new partnerships that will move us forward and make us prosper.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS/LEADERSHIP

I know as women in business and leaders in your fields, that's something you're very good at.

I'm often asked to speak about what it means to be a woman in business or a woman in leadership – but I think that's kind of a misnomer. You see there's no difference between the work a man would have to do and the work a woman would do as a marketing director or a CEO. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that a man in the Lt. Governor's office would have the same constitutional responsibilities and the same job description as I do.

That said, a man and a woman are different creatures. I like to remind myself that Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, but she did it backwards and in high heels!

There's no escaping who we are, whether we're building a business or keeping our households together. The traditional roles men and women have always had are still with us.

Women didn't give up much when we entered the workplace – that just became our second job! And women who are driven to succeed place the bar pretty high for themselves. I know my past attempts to recruit talented individuals to run for office was met with a common refrain – the women believed they had to be overqualified to run. But the men, to their credit, thought they were born qualified! It's a matter of confidence.

I know your dreams and passion for your work are what keep you going. Independence and freedom, success and a better quality of life for you and your family – those are strong motivators.

There is a lot of talent and drive in this room. I recognize that motivation to do your best, to lead and to tackle a good challenge – it's the same motivation that inspires me when my feet hit the floor in the morning.

I am from time to time the only skirt in a room full of black suits. Some of you have likely been there too, and we know the challenges women face in responding to the call to leadership. We thankfully live in a country and a culture that appreciates female leadership and allows it to thrive.

A few years ago I led a state trade mission to Taiwan and Vietnam, and I can tell you the difference in our cultures is real. My favorite example of that came when we arrived for a meeting with some key leaders, and my name plate read “Mr. Becky Skillman.”

And if that weren't bad enough, it happened again just a few weeks ago. I had a meeting in my office with an official delegation from China and their local newspaper reported that the group met with “Mr. Becky Skillman.” Sometimes, it's painfully obvious that women still aren't expected to lead.

But in America and in Indiana it's more and more common to see women in leadership – whether it's in politics and government, education or business. And more than that we want to see more women taking on those roles.

That's one reason we make a point of contracting with women owned businesses in state government.

There are a lot of needs and lots of purchases in state government, and we keep track of who we're working with as we serve Hoosiers. We do that through a certification process in our Department of Administration.

More than 1,400 women-owned businesses have been certified and it couldn't be easier to start the ball rolling to certify your business.

It's our goal in state government to provide a helping hand to the business community wherever we can. And our business-friendly attitude has helped us weather the economic storm we've been living through the past 2 years.

## ECONOMY

Our state is a beacon of fiscal stability in America, and even we have taken many hits as we attempt to maintain our strength. Even with all the efficiencies created and reductions in state agency budgets, you might say the hard work is just beginning.

*(Note: To view charts, please visit [www.lg.in.gov](http://www.lg.in.gov) and click on the link, "Indiana Gains National Attention." Charts are updated regularly and may not be the same as what is reflected)*

Chart 2: You can see that we may have less money to work with when we adopt the budget in 2011 than we had in 2006. But we have already made a commitment to live within our means, and not raise taxes.

Chart 3: We know that low taxes are precisely what have kept us so strong for so long. The Tax Foundation ranked IN as 12<sup>th</sup> best state for business tax – up from 14<sup>th</sup> last year – and in each year we were best in the Midwest.

Chart 4: You can see Indiana has not raised taxes, one of very few states that hasn't since the beginning of the recession.

Chart 5: As you can see, we have done a lot to tighten our belts. State Agency budgets have been reduced by 20 percent in an already lean state government. We've instituted a hiring freeze, no pay raises, voluntary unpaid leave, reduced state fleet of vehicles, other initiatives, and cuts to higher education and public schools have been our last resort.

Chart 6: Standard and Poor's: We worked so hard to obtain a AAA credit rating a few years ago for the first time in our state's history. And now, we're working equally hard to maintain it. It does, indeed, make a difference to investors as they consolidate, expand, or locate new businesses here.

In 2009, CEO's from across the country named Indiana as the most business-friendly state in the Midwest and one of the best in the nation.

Chart 7: And Forbes puts Indiana first in the Midwest and 6<sup>th</sup> nationally for the COST of doing business.

We have the best “sandbox” or economic development tool box through a number of new initiatives we’ve undertaken since 2005 - Major moves, telecom reform, patent income exemption, Buy Indiana, property tax relief, regulatory reform.

Chart 8: Despite the recession last year our states’ Economic Development Corporation has exceeded expectations. The state has sealed deals with more than 150 businesses statewide that have committed nearly 20,000 new jobs.

In 2009, Indiana won 48 competitive consolidations where national or international companies saw the need to consolidate then chose Indiana as the best place for the streamlined operation.

We’ve worked with local leaders here in LaPorte County to expand Monosol LLC’s manufacturing operations. Monosol is investing 18 million dollars and hiring more of your friends and neighbors.

And there are some outstanding small businesses that are making a name for themselves as well. Global land Surveying was one of our 2010 EDGE Award Winners – our program recognizing the entrepreneurial force that keeps our economy alive. And “A Packaging Systems LLC” was named one of our Economic Development Corporation’s Companies to Watch last year by the state’s Economic Development Corporation.

These are the businesses that call this area home and there can be more like them.

It’s undeniable we still have many Hoosier families struggling and this continues to be a difficult period in our national economy. But I’m confident when we have finally passed through it; Indiana will be well positioned to surge forward once again.

Every step we can take to allow business to move forward is a step forward for us all. It’s easy for some to assume a government-fix mentality, the idea that government can fix everything or make it better by being more and more involved.

But we know from experience that government cannot create prosperity. It’s the work of individuals, risk takers and leaders like those we honor today. What government CAN do is help create an environment where prosperity is possible.

## CONCLUSION

We all have some big responsibilities right now and a lot of work to do. But if we do our jobs right, Indiana will continue to be in a good position.

I want to thank you for the meaningful way you are contributing Indiana's economy. As women in business and leaders in your fields, you're contributing to our long-term economic recovery in a unique way.

Indiana's growth, economic development and community development are ultimately in your hands. You are the ones who care about the future of our communities and the future of our state. You are a big reason Indiana we'll see a complete economic comeback.

Thanks for all you do, and congratulations to our nominees!